



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

The Body and Blood of Christ



Last Supper: A Ukrainian Icon (1728). Unknown artist.
Original work in National Art Museum, Kiev.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2. The Preface for Holy Thursday

Option 3.

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ in some ways is a duplication of the Holy Thursday Liturgy. However, it is most appropriate that a separate feast be set aside for reflection and meditation upon so great a gift as the Eucharist since Holy Thursday does share the focus with the events of Good Friday and the Easter Vigil. Eucharist is a worthy enough tenet of faith that special focus is required to fully appreciate the enormity of the gift.
- ▶ This solemnity is called an “idea feast.” An idea feast expresses focus on a particular truth or element of Christian teaching. Such feasts arose in response to some trial within or outside the church such as heresy. The four solemnities include Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart and Christ the King.
- ▶ This feast dates to the twelfth century in response to controversies regarding the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas’ theology of Eucharist in his Summa resonates throughout the feast and provides a focus for the feast. He elucidates theology of Eucharist in terms of past, present and future. In relation to the past the Eucharist remembers Christ’ passion, death, and resurrection. In relation to the present the Eucharist unites us as one Body in Christ—to Christ and one another. In relation to the future, Eucharist looks forward to the banquet we will one day share in heaven.
- ▶ (See Word and Worship Workbook, Year C, Mary Birmingham, Solemnity of Body and Blood Christ: “liturgical context” for a more thorough treatment of this feast.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today’s liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today’s Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading 1: Genesis 14, 18-20

- ▶ Abraham sets out to save his nephew Lot. With a small entourage of troops Abraham rescued Lot, conquered four kings and returned home.
- ▶ It was the custom that the conquered king would welcome and minister to the victorious king and his entourage in hopes that they would have mercy on the conquered and resist the temptation to destroy everything in their path.
- ▶ The high priest and king of Salem, Melchisedek, greets Abraham with sincere welcome and hospitality.
- ▶ Melchisedek offered bread and wine in a special ritual that prayed for God’s blessing.
- ▶ Abraham became acutely aware that his victory was due to God’s intervention and providence. In response he promised Melchisedek, the priest of God, a tenth of his possessions.
- ▶ Abraham was not a ruthless victor. He simply wanted his forces to be duly

compensated for their victory and he expected Lot's possessions to be returned to him. He did not exact huge war booty as most conquerors were accustomed to doing.

- ▶ Abraham honored Melchizedek as God's representative. Melchizedek blessed Abraham with a blessing that God honored and made real in the life of Abraham.
- ▶ Later Christian writers refer to this episode as prefiguring Christ asserting that the priesthood of Jesus originated in God and was beyond any human institution or creation.
- ▶ Melchizedek is remembered today in the Eucharistic Prayer IV of the Mass.
- ▶ Melchizedek looked forward to the coming of Christ who would forge a new covenant with God's people and through his unique priesthood, rooted in his humanity and his divinity, offer his life for the human race.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What is unique about the Abraham and Melchizedek episode? Why is it remembered as significant in Jewish and Christian history?
- ▶ What are the lessons to be learned by the action of Melchizedek?
- ▶ What are the lessons to be learned by the lesson of Abraham?
- ▶ How might their story invite a response in your life today?
- ▶ What is the good news in this reading?

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

- ▶ St. Paul's reading, believed to be the oldest account of the earliest celebrations of Eucharist, reflects that ancient ritual of breaking bread that has survived down to today. Paul's letter to the Corinthians expresses Eucharistic theology—the meaning associated with the Eucharist.
- ▶ The reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a very ancient text as it reveals a celebration of Eucharist in which an actual meal was sandwiched between the offering of bread and the cup. Only the very earliest, most ancient celebrations of Eucharist (called *Breaking of the Bread*) placed an actual meal between bread and cup.
- ▶ The unleavened bread of Passover is a living memorial of the events of the people of Israel's passage from slavery to freedom. The Israelites used unleavened bread since there was, in effect, no time for the bread to rise. They were people who were ready to go on the Lord's command. The unleavened Bread of the Eucharist

is a sign of Jesus' passage from death to life that gained for us passage from slavery to sin to freedom from the eternal effects of sin.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ The blood of the paschal lamb protected the Israelites from death. They were freed from slavery and were given freedom and led to the Promised Land. Jesus passed from death to life thus freeing us from slavery to sin. Consider your own life. In what way, if any, can you relate to the freedom the Israelites were given after four hundred years in captivity and the freedom Christ won for us on the cross?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced deliverance from anything? Perhaps a newfound freedom (an image of the Promised Land) a movement from something awful [slavery] to something wonderful [freedom] in your life?

Gospel: Luke 9 11b-17

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ Original listeners of this story would have remembered a similar story in which God's power was manifest when Elisha fed one hundred men with twenty loaves.
- ▶ There are also echoes of feeding the Israelites with manna in the desert thus supporting Luke's intention to portray Jesus as a Moses-like, prophetic figure.
- ▶ Luke's intent was also to proclaim the reign of God.
- ▶ Teaching and healing were signs that the kingdom of God was at hand.
- ▶ The Messiah—Jesus, the Christ—inaugurated his kingdom with deferential care for the poor and oppressed. The hallmark of his kingdom was not wealth, power or prestige. The hallmark of Jesus' kingdom was suffering for the sake of the kingdom. Jesus gave us the example and invited his followers to do the same.
- ▶ Jesus is the host of this feast, unlike other meals in which he was the guest.

- ▶ Everyone was invited to this feast; no invitations were required and the apostles served the meal.
- ▶ Very often the issue of social status and who enjoyed the most privileged status surfaced at various meal events in the Gospels. This meal, however, simply had one focus and one goal—to feed hungry people and prepare them for mission.
- ▶ Jesus offered them hospitality and then he nourished them not only with food, but with his teaching as well. They were fed with his word and a holy meal.
- ▶ The ritual words and actions of taking, blessing, breaking and sharing reflected the Eucharistic liturgy that would be repeated again at the Last Supper and Emmaus, continued through the ages to today.
- ▶ The abundant meal of this Gospel heals, reconciles and prepares them for mission in the world.
- ▶ Luke is concerned with leadership in the community once Jesus is gone. Today's abundance of food is a reminder to future leaders of the community that they are not to worry. God will provide and God will go with them.
- ▶ Also, there is another lesson to be learned: those who give can expect to receive. Christ provides for his people.
- ▶ One cannot miss the symbolism of the number twelve. Luke is the only evangelist that calls the disciples “the Twelve”. They gather twelve baskets. Twelve is symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel. These now are the *new* Twelve who will lead the *new* community into the future.
- ▶ The Eucharistic theology that underpins this story is as relevant two thousand years later as it was then. Eucharist heals, reconciles, nourishes, invites intimate relationship with God and others and commits us to the poor. Saint and sinner alike were welcomed to the healing banquet.
- ▶ If all were fed then, the same holds today--all are to be fed now. There is a moral imperative in this Gospel. Eucharist demands that we ask who is still hungry and take steps to feed them—no matter where the hungry exist in the world.
- ▶ The Spirit empowers Eucharistic people to become Eucharist in the world.

- ▶ “Eucharist never fully satiates; we are always left with a hunger for more, for complete immersion and unity in the Body of Christ. We are never finished growing in and through the sacrament of Eucharist. Eucharist built on a purely private personal experience of Christ is the sacrament turned inward. All sacraments are our participation in the paschal mystery of Christ. If, through our participation in the Eucharist, we are unwilling to live, suffer, die and rise for others and participate in the Spirit life of the Church, Eucharist then becomes a self serving moment of personal piety rather than participation in Jesus' life” (Mary Birmingham, *Word and Worship Workbook*, Year C, New York: Paulist Press, 1998; Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, 566-567).



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ What theology of Eucharist is expressed in this gospel?
- ▶ Imagine you are present at this event. You have come a long way and are a long way from home. You have sacrificed a great deal just to hear Jesus preach. The day wears on and you discover that it is getting late. There are no fast food places to eat. You are hungry. Then Jesus not only touched your soul in amazing ways throughout the day but he also took a meager amount of provisions and multiplied them to feed not only you but the hordes who came to see him. What would be your response? Can you imagine a way in which this same dynamic is played out today? What does it teach us about the Eucharist? What is the promise of the Eucharist?
- ▶ God raises up leaders in each community. What lessons can we learn about leadership from this Gospel? Could God be calling you into a leadership role in his mission of evangelization?
- ▶ What does it mean that this Gospel prepared people for mission in the world? What is the lesson for you in this mission-oriented Gospel?
- ▶ The Holy Spirit empowers us to become Eucharist in the world. Have you ever known anyone who is Eucharist in your world? What characteristics does this person possess? Drawing from your experience of this person, what does it mean to “become Eucharist”?
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today’s liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God’s call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. Imagine Melchisedek's situation. Abraham conquered him. Yet in the midst of his dire situation he offered Abraham hospitality and God's blessings because he could see that God was with Abraham.

He is an example of pure humility and an absence of malice and arrogance. Most leaders would be indignant and would hardly see God's action and providence in one's enemies.

I think the lesson today is to consider those with whom we have disagreements and whose belief systems are so different from our own as possibly being right with God and even further, being ordained by God.

I remember a situation in which an acquaintance and I were on two opposite poles regarding a certain issue. She thought her position was the only position and I am sure I subliminally did the same.

Rather than villainizing each other we came together in mutual consideration, love and with willingness to dialogue. As a result of our encounter we became friends who were willing to pray together and simply agree to disagree about this particular issue.

Melchisedek is an example for the entire world today---to cast aside arrogant pride and reach out and offer God's blessing to our seeming enemies---in the process Abraham found a friend instead of an enemy. Is it possible that we too would be similarly surprised?

#2. While I am deeply moved by Easter joy and the resurrection hope it offers us, I can relate to the frustration of the Israelites in their four hundred year sojourn. Our family has waited for a medical miracle for one of our members—a miracle that never seems to materialize. Things will improve and we are able to see God's movement in the midst of the illness, and then conditions worsen once again, and we fear another four hundred year sojourn of frustration. It is a journey of extreme highs and lows.

What we have learned is that God is faithful and walks with us in the midst of the slavery of this illness. We are called to wait on the Lord and to keep our eyes on God and not the disease. We have learned that we only have today and that we are not to worry about tomorrow, as it will take care of itself.

In the meantime I am strengthened and nourished by the Eucharist, especially the Paschal Blood of the Lamb whose blood runs through my veins. My fervent prayer is "May this Precious Blood pour from me into the life of my very sick child." It has sustained me throughout these very long twelve years.

#3. Eucharist prepares us for mission. We are to become what we have received. When we approach the Lord's Table with the realization that Eucharist is what empowers us to

go out into the world and share the Good News, take up our cross and live the Gospel, we are able to more fully and consciously cooperate with the grace of the sacrament.

So many people have been Eucharist in my life. One event stands out. My severely mentally ill child was on the road; we had not heard from him for a long time. We lived in constant worry for his safety as he was in no condition to care for himself.

One night we received a phone call from him. He was in a city where a friend of mine lived. I called her and told her that he was at the airport. Her entire family went to the airport, picked him up, took him to their home, fed him, cared for him, and allowed him to stay with them until he could get his bearings. That very special family bent over backwards to reach out to my child. They cared for him for several months until we were able to convince him to return home. This wonderful family reached out to us in love; they were the hands and feet of Christ. They were Eucharist to us.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Symbols of Bread and Wine
Eucharist Series
Sacraments

Evangelization
Catholic Social Teaching
Kingdom of God

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

Today we hear how Melchisedek offered Abraham hospitality, we hear the oldest account of the institution of the Eucharist and we hear the story of Jesus feeding the multitudes. This feast focuses on the Eucharist. Thus today's session will focus on the sacramental symbols of bread and wine—the heart of the Eucharist.

EUCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. The solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ is an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Mass. Thus, for the next four weeks we will break open the four parts of the Mass. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.

SACRAMENTS

Jesus is present to us in the sacraments. Jesus promises to send his Spirit to go forth with his community of believers as they establish the reign of God in the world. We are strengthened to go forth through our participation in the sacraments. Christ's presence and union continues through the generations in the sacraments. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of SACRAMENTS.

EVANGELIZATION

Jesus feeds his followers; he nourishes them with a sacred meal and with his word. He feeds them in order to strengthen them for the mission to build the kingdom of God. We are called to go forth and share what Jesus has given us with those still asleep to his life within. Thus, the focus of today's doctrinal session will be what the Church teaches us about EVANGELIZATION.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Jesus invites everyone to his feast. All are welcome. He especially welcomes the poor and oppressed. Eucharist commits us to the poor and to the social teaching of the Church. Thus, today, the doctrinal focus will be Catholic Social Teaching.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus came to establish the kingdom. Today he shows his disciples what leadership entails---feeding people with his word and with a sacred meal—serving and ministering to their needs. Those who are called to establish the reign of God are to follow the example of Jesus. This section of Luke's Gospel focuses on Jesus' mission to establish the reign of God and prepare his disciples for his absence. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the KINGDOM OF GOD.